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HELIN Annual Conference Opening Remarks (2014)

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HELIN Annual Conference 2014 Opening Remarks

By Rosita E. Hopper, D.A.
Dean of Libraries, Johnson & Wales University
Chairman of the HELIN Board of Directors, 2012-2014

HELIN at 30. It sounds a bit venerable in organizational time, but in people time, she is just hitting her stride, just getting beyond the illusions of youth. One's 30s can be good. And I'm here to confirm that the 50s also rock.

What a span for libraries, the years between 1984 and 2014. In 1984, I was in my first academic library job at Boston College, a time before the ubiquity of e-mail or the world wide web... a time when we still maintained a massive card catalog. Computer technology was just becoming integrated into library operations, though each system was closed and required its own dedicated workstation... a time when we used Faxon to track periodicals, and getting records from OCLC to our GEAC system took periodic data loads from magnetic tape. In 1984, Boston College's IT department consisted of one dude... though granted it was becoming clear that he was going to soon be in considerably more demand.

Do you think libraries have changed a lot in 30 years? I don't. Helping people to appreciate and explore the rich meaning available to them through the record of human creativity is still our main stock in trade. Yes, the technology changes.. The organizational and the discovery tools change. But the devotion of our profession to the byproducts of art, of discourse and scholarship... that is constant, and will remain so at whatever age HELIN might attain.

Has HELIN been helpful to us as? I believe It has been primary. But can it continue to be, and if so, how? That is the question perpetually before the HELIN Board of Directors. And perhaps earlier in the evolution of HELIN the answer seemed more obvious, partly because there were fewer technological and organizational choices. But I posit that there will always be librarianship, and that librarianship will always be stronger when unified by a communal effort such as HELIN.

So on this day, when we step back from our day to day activities and focus instead on ourselves as members or friends of HELIN, the HELIN Bard of Directors is asking a favor, and using pretty basic technology with which to do it. We are asking that you fill out the blue form, because we must continue to talk to each other meaningfully, from the heart, about the meaning of HELIN. I ask everyone in this room to pitch in today, and share your thoughts with the Board about HELIN.

Before I introduce our first speaker, I also want to invite the staff of every HELIN library to stay for the business meeting following the raffle. By that time we will ALL be tired, all replete with so much input, but the Board made a commitment several years ago to the principle of holding an annual business meeting and I ask that you show your support for this principle by sticking around. There will be wine and cheese, and we will review the year's progress in fulfilling our strategic goals. At that time, I will speak briefly not only to the year's activities, but to new ideas that came out of my meetings with the affinity groups, with many of you.. We may also be able to review some of the tweets we hope to see posted over the course of the day.

I close these remarks by paraphrasing John F. Kennedy, Jr. 'Ask not what your consortium can do for you; ask what you can do for your consortium.'

But now to our first speaker, a journalist who has made some discomfiting observations about the familiar economic model of American higher education... unsustainable costs, and a generation of college students drowning in debt. Anya KameNetz has also written extensively about newer alternatives to the traditional higher education model. Some in the field may feel threatened by her writings, but I do not see Kamenetz challenging the concept of organized higher learning. Instead I see her asking how we can make it better. Please join me in welcoming Anya Kamenetz.